**Update for City Council - Solid Waste and Recycling (Sustainable Materials Management)**

The Solid Waste Commission (SWC) has been meeting regularly since September 2016. Waneta Trabert, the Director of Environmental Affairs who was hired in May of 2016, oversees the City’s robust Solid Waste & Recycling program. Last February, a part time administrative assistant was hired to assist Waneta. Her responsibilities include tracking daily service requests and waste and recycling tonnages, running social media and doing outreach for the Recycle Right Newton app.

**Name Change**

The Environmental Affairs Division requests to change its name to the Sustainable Materials Management Division. The term better reflects the values and goals of sustainable materials management (SMM) in which discarded items have value and the focus is on source reduction, re-design, re-use, composting and recycling over incineration and landfilling the ash.

**Recycle Right Newton app**

The City’s Recycle Right Newton app (also accessible by the City’s website) is a tool that helps remind residents of their trash day, which is especially helpful around the holidays. Residents can also receive text, calendar or phone call reminders. A Recycle Right search bar (a modern version of the Recyclopedia) tool empowers residents to check how to get rid of materials correctly. The app provides data to Environmental Affairs on what people are searching for or answering wrong in the sorting game, which is useful in targeting education campaigns.

**Curbside Organics Pilot Plan**

Per data from MassDEP (2014), organics make up an average of 26.6% (by weight) of the overall municipal solid waste (MSW) stream in Massachusetts This pilot is a first step to gather data on organics waste collection with the goals of recovering valuable food waste for composting and to reduce disposal costs. The organics pilot will provide 200 households with curbside organics collection for a 4-month period starting March 12, 2018. Participants will use 5-gallon collection buckets for their organics waste and Bootstrap Compost will pick up the waste curbside. The program also includes an educational campaign to empower and encourage participants to reduce the generation of food waste. Data gathered will be used to apply for a grant to run an expanded pilot in 2019.

**Recycling Contamination Rates**

In October, Waste Management (WM) informed the City that our green cart contamination (or, residue) rate exceeded the 10% limit (by weight) specified in our current contract. WM informed the City it had conducted 17 separate audits of Newton’s recyclables at its recycling facility from January through Oct. 4, 2017, which showed a contamination rate of 18%. The City is now being charged an extra monthly fee. From November through January, the extra charges amount to $21,740.74. The City is currently reviewing the audit methodology that WM recently provided that was used for determining the contamination rate.

Environmental Affairs is also gathering information on other municipalities’ residue rate thresholds and has requested the dates for future residue rate audits by WM at their recycling facility.

Further complicating the issue, last July China announced it would soon impose stricter environmental standards for their imported recyclable materials – the contamination limit was severely reduced to 0.5%, which is virtually impossible to meet with existing technology and, thus, amounts to a ban. Since about 50% of the developed world’s recyclables were being sent to China, the new limit that took effect on March 1 is wreaking havoc on global recycling markets.

Major contaminants of recycling carts continue to be plastic bags and film, food and beverage contamination and textiles (clothing). We have work to do to improve the quality of recyclables and reduce contamination in both the short and long term. The focus is on educating residents on accepted materials and providing effective enforcement of curbside compliance.

**Curbside Compliance Policy**

DPW’s Curbside Compliance Policy follows a “3 strikes” protocol that includes a “no go-back” provision for 3 or more offenses within any 12-month period. After each reported curbside infraction, a household will receive: Strike 1) Educational flyer and Informational letter, Strike 2) Educational flyer and Warning letter, and Strike 3) A letter, educational material, “no go-back” and, in theory, a fine (but never implemented). Infractions are noted at the curb only when visible (current enforcement does not include observing materials within carts with closed lids).

The SWC has recommended implementation of the “no go-back” provision of the Policy in “strike 3”, which means that WM will not return to pick up non-compliant carts upon resident request. This is a best practice recommended by MassDEP and avoids the added step of administering a fine. In response to a letter the SWC recently sent to the Mayor, the Mayor expressed support to implement the “no go-back” provision to the SWC Chair last week. Environmental Affairs foresees that implementation will begin in April or May.

**Staffing Needs**

The SWC is recommending additional full-time staff for the Environmental Affairs Division. The staffing is critical for effective enforcement of the Curbside Compliance Policy, to continue increasing education and outreach efforts to residents, to perform other cost avoidance/cost reduction projects and to implement the initiatives outlined in Waneta’s Sustainable Materials Management Framework report, including the curbside organics pilot project starting this month. Here is a link to the report:

http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/80594

An investment in staff will allow us to jump from simply maintaining the current level of services, to pursuing comprehensive cost reduction and cost avoidance strategies. It also demonstrates our commitment to the hard work of the Director of Environmental Affairs, Waneta Trabert and the members of the Solid Waste Commission, including our Chair Marian Rambelle.

**State Grant Programs**

Environmental Affairs has been diligent in applying for grant money and has received several grants from MassDEP totaling $84,500. In addition, we are applying for a MassDEP grant in March to conduct a summer 2018 survey of the contents of carts on pickup days, including applying an “Oops” tag to non-compliant carts. This grant will pay for seasonal staff to lift cart lids in 1-2 targeted areas for a period of 12-16 weeks to track cart compliance tied to targeted outreach efforts.

The City also applies annually for the MassDEP Recycling Dividends grant program in which the City earns points for providing certain solid waste and recycling services and/or having certain policies on the books. Each point is worth a dollar amount scaled by municipal population. Each point in the program was worth $4,000 in grant funding for Newton in 2017.

**Codify Best Practices**

The City was not eligible in 2017 to earn one Recycling Dividends grant point based on private hauler regulations in city ordinances. This is because the current ordinance does not meet all of MassDEP’s recommendations, including a recommendation that private trash haulers be required to also collect recycling from all their customers in the City. MassDEP provides model language for ordinances.

Next step is a review of MassDEP’s best practices for private hauler regulations along with the current practices of private haulers in Newton, including discussing these issues with stakeholders (businesses, apartment buildings, haulers, etc). Based on input and review, it would make sense to have our local ordinances include mandatory recycling in the private hauler regulations (similar to an ordinance already in effect in the Town of Brookline). This will ensure that all private haulers operating in Newton and their customers are in compliance with the Massachusetts Waste Bans (310 CMR 19.017), which prohibit the landfilling or incineration of certain recoverable/recyclable materials.

Refer to this[MassDEP page](https://www.mass.gov/lists/implementing-mandatory-recycling-private-hauler-regulations)and [this guidance document](https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/04/bab/haulerbmp.pdf) for best management practices**.**

**Polystyrene Ban Subcommittee**:

The subcommittee is recommending a ban on polystyrene products at food establishments. Removing polystyrene from the waste stream already has been implemented in 26 Massachusetts municipalities and is a step way overdue – the City first explored a polystyrene ban back in 1989! The Subcommittee has worked with and considered the concerns of the Newton-Needham Regional Chamber, and has researched alternatives for takeout containers, meat trays and coolers. The Health and Human Services Department also surveyed City restaurants last year and most respondents were not opposed to a ban. A docket item will be before the Council this spring.

Thank you to our Chair, Marian Rambelle and to Waneta Trabert our Director of Environmental Affairs for their valuable comments and edits to this summary.

**The SWC typically meets on the 3rd Thursday of the month, from 6:45 - 8:15 pm. All are welcome.**